



THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

Testimony in Opposition to SR 0007

Presented to the Senate Committee on Natural Resources

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The Humane Society of the United States

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On behalf of The Humane Society of the United States and our supporters in Michigan, I thank you for this opportunity to testify in opposition to Senate Resolution 7, which endorses state oversight of wolves to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Michigan Natural Resources Commission (NRC) and requests that the DNR and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) appeal a recent court decision reinstating federal protection for Great Lakes wolves under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The majority of Michiganders value wolves because they protect ecosystems, control deer populations and reduce deer-auto collisions. They have made it abundantly clear they do not support trophy hunting or trapping of wolves and that they do not blindly trust our state DNR to effectively manage wolves on their own. In November, Michigan voters repealed Proposal 1 (moving the wolf to the game species list) and they defeated Proposal 2 (giving the Natural Resources Commission the authority to decide which species can be hunted). The latter measure was rejected in 69 of 83 counties showing support for wolves is strong across the state.

On December 19, 2014, a federal district court mandated that the FWS reinstitute federal protections for the Great Lakes population of wolves. Wolves in Michigan were relisted as “endangered.” The court chided the FWS for failing to explain why it ignored the potential for further recovery of wolves into areas of its historic range that remain viable habitat for the species. The court also noted that the FWS has failed to explain how the “virtually unregulated” killing of wolves by states and disease like canine parvovirus (a major killer of pups) in the Great Lakes region do not constitute continued threats to the species.

This ruling comes after five prior court orders that rejected the FWS’s premature decisions to eliminate federal protections for Great Lakes wolves in the past decade. The latest decision sends a sixth rebuke to the FWS, which has demonstrated a pattern of behavior to prematurely delist wolf populations.

Gray wolf populations are still recovering from decades of persecution and habitat loss and cannot recover without federal protections. In the few years since the species was delisted, trophy hunters and trappers have killed more than 1,500 Great Lakes wolves under hostile state management programs that encourage dramatic reductions in wolf populations. Michigan’s program relied on fear and rhetoric, and was spurred on by a fabricated story about the killing of wolves outside a U.P. day care center that was later retracted on the Senate floor.

There are currently an estimated 636 wolves in Michigan, down from the population count of 687 four years ago. The state conducted its first and only trophy hunting season in 2013—

claiming it was needed to “manage wolf conflicts” with livestock, dogs, and humans—in which 22 wolves were killed.

A vocal minority of individuals have exhibited extreme animosity toward wolves. When asked about this Resolution, Senator Casperson was recently quoted as stating that “[W]e have seen the number of wolf attacks on livestock and dogs increase over the last year . . . it is imperative for this unreasonable decision by one judge to be overturned.” But this increase had been predicted in a study presented to the NRC in August of 2013, titled “Evaluating the Scientific Soundness of Plans for Harvesting Wolves to Manage Depredations in Michigan,” by a panel of esteemed biologists from Michigan Tech, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Ohio State University, and the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians. The report pointed out that the available evidence clearly indicated that the DNR’s plan to use a wolf hunt to manage conflicts with livestock would be “remarkably inefficient and ineffective,” and added that a wolf hunting season could disrupt packs and cause the number of attacks on livestock to increase. The NRC predictably ignored this admonition and the DNR conducted its wolf hunt.

Then in late 2014, a study out of Washington State University cited 25 years of research to demonstrate that, when disrupted by lethal control, wolf families split up, overcompensate with increased reproduction, and then kill even more livestock.

It therefore would make perfect sense that after Michigan’s first wolf hunt in 2013, confirmed wolf attacks on livestock reportedly increased. However, the truth of the matter is that Michigan’s wolf depredation data was distorted; an MLive investigation determined that the site of more than sixty percent of all wolf attacks in Michigan was a farm owned by John Koski, a U.P. farmer who baited wolves with deer and cow carcasses and who later pleaded no contest to animal cruelty charges.

While livestock depredation is rare, we believe that there is a reasonable alternative to completely delisting gray wolves. Just yesterday, The HSUS and conservation and tribal groups across the Great Lakes filed a petition asking the USFWS to consider reclassifying the gray wolf as “threatened” throughout the conterminous United States. A threatened classification would continue needed federal oversight of wolf recovery efforts while providing regulatory flexibility to turn some management authority over to states where appropriate, and maintain increased protections where still required. For example, and as currently implanted in Minnesota, a threatened listing helps livestock owners by permitting management under a Section 4(d) rule that allows agencies to use lethal control of wolves to resolve wolf-livestock conflicts.

For all of these reasons, we urge the committee to vote No on Senate Resolution 7. The future of the gray wolf is in our hands and we must ensure protections are not fully and prematurely taken away.

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